

TITLE: TV in the Directorate of Intelligence

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~~Secret~~*Uses and attitudes***TV IN THE DIRECTORATE  
OF INTELLIGENCE**

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**R**ecent research indicates that the impact of TV news on American public opinion may be more pervasive than a casual consideration would suggest. Much of this research has been done by Professor Shanto Iyengar of UCLA. His findings imply that the manner in which US TV news is presented to the public not only influences what people think *about* but also what to *think*. The way in which a news story is "framed" can influence the public's focus when assigning blame for social problems that are discussed on the broadcasts or when asked to suggest remedies for these ills. A news story on unemployment that focuses on the plight of a recently laid-off worker has an "episodic" frame; the broadcasting network has taken one episode of a larger problem and reports it. Conversely, should unemployment be presented in terms of the "big picture," with facts and figures, and economic correspondents providing their views on the latest figures, the frame is labeled "thematic."

The research indicates that when viewers are exposed to episodic framing of an issue such as unemployment, they tend to "personalize" the news and to focus on unemployed *people* as both the cause and remedy of unemployment. On the other hand, viewers exposed to the predominantly thematic coverage of unemployment overwhelmingly tend to hold the government responsible for the problem and to cite increased government attention as the remedy. Hence, how the news is presented can affect to whom the public will assign responsibility and the nature of additional policy demands. The consequences of this power are significant.

**Experiments and Research**

Laboratory experiments provide much of the evidence on the impact of TV news on public attitudes. Typically, subjects in these experiments view network TV news broadcasts that have been altered to include stories designed for the experiment. By subjecting subsets of the viewers to different altered broadcasts, the researchers have been able to study the ability of TV news to inflate the importance of specific issues as well as influence how the viewers assign causality for social problems. But just how strong is the impact of TV news on public opinion outside of the laboratory? Do the research findings hold true when the sample of subjects is drawn from the national population, who watch the evening news each day over an extended time?

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In preparing this project, the question arose of whether analysts in the Directorate of Intelligence (DI) use foreign TV in analysis as both as a source of information and as a tool for prediction? To try to answer the question, I interviewed three to six analysts from various offices who were known to watch the TV news from their areas of responsibility. The analysts at times also watched documentaries, interviews, and other programs of possible interest. The number of interviewees usually reflected TV

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news availability in the office and the ease with which it was obtained. Generally, if the news can be obtained with a short turnaround time, then the analyst will use it.

### Factors Affecting TV Viewing

The widely varying ways in which analysts use foreign TV and their reasons for using it depend in part on the nature of the individual analyst's duties. Analysts in the Office of Leadership Analysis (LDA), the Office of Scientific Weapons and Research (OSWR) and the Office of Imagery Analysis (OIA) are primarily interested in the video content of foreign TV. In the area offices, some analysts use foreign TV primarily as a source of information and others use it to gain a sense of government or public attitudes. Most of the analysts interviewed fell somewhere in between; they realized that TV is more than a quick source of information, but they did not fully understand its potential uses.

In addition to availability and ease of viewing, the degree of TV watching in the DI depends on language skills, office culture, other sources of information, and amount of time available. All of these factors are directly influenced by the analysts' opinion of the usefulness of TV news.

Because of the ready *availability* of broadcasts from their countries, the Office of European Analysis (EURA) and the Office of Slavic and Eurasian Analysis (OSE) seem to watch TV news more than other offices. Some EURA analysts watch the news from its countries on a daily basis. OSE has a roster of analysts who take turns watching the news and writing summaries for distribution throughout the office. These two offices also have many analysts with the necessary foreign language abilities. In contrast, the Office of Near East and South Asia Analysis (NESA) has fewer newscasts from its countries on the grid, and analysts do not watch them on a daily basis. This is probably due in part to the number of NESA's Arabic and Hebrew speakers, but, if an analyst has to order a tape of the news because it was not broadcast on the grid, he or she tends to make less use of TV.

*Office culture* is another factor. This partly refers to the importance that management places on watching the news. Managers in OSE, for example, watch Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) news themselves, and they also ask analysts about what they have seen. One analyst said that she began taking a serious interest in TV viewing when the office director started to ask analysts about what they had seen; several other analysts also mentioned the director's viewing habits.

Office culture also refers to the mindset of the individual analysts within the office. Several analysts from the same office indicated that they have little use for the news. The most prevalent attitude seemed to be "we already know the story through other sources" or "the government controls the media, and we already have a good idea of the government line through other sources." If this thinking is prevalent, obstacles to using the news, such as a language barrier, will not be overcome.

The *availability of other sources* of information and the *time available* to watch TV also affected viewing. A busy analyst who believes he or she can get information quicker elsewhere may not take the time to watch the news. If an analyst regards TV as just another source, he or she would tend to ignore TV, especially if it required more effort to watch the news than it does to read (b)(3)(n) <sup>analytic</sup>. Conversely, if an analyst regards TV as a unique source of information that can be used as an analytical tool, then obstacles are more likely to be overcome.

Two examples that illustrate this point involve language ability. An Asian analyst who cannot speak the local language watches the TV coverage of the parliament to get a sense of the severity of the debate. She usually obtains a transcript in advance from Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) translations (b)(3)(n). She believes TV news adds a unique dimension to her analysis. Her inability to understand the language makes her more selective about what she watches, however, and her viewing is often event driven. On the other hand, one analyst working on a Middle Eastern country rarely watches TV because he does not speak the language; he believes he receives all the information he needs through FBIS media translations. He ob-

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tains 80 percent of his information about the country from the print media.

In OIA, OSWR, and LDA, TV news may not be watched daily, but it is still recognized at times as a unique source of visual information. Analysts in these offices depend on FBIS to filter their viewing. Much of their analysis is not time sensitive, and they have the luxury of scanning the summaries and ordering tapes of what they want to see. Also, FBIS provides compilation tapes based on their requirements, and many analysts believe this is adequate. When the analysis is time sensitive and the analysts need the footage immediately, they tend to rely more upon getting the tape from FBIS than from watching the grid. If they cannot get a timely tape, however, they will reassess their need for the footage, often deciding that it does not warrant the effort of obtaining the video.

### Use of Foreign TV

Analysts use foreign TV for everything from practicing their language skills to analyzing government propaganda. Many also believe that analysis requires "seeing" the atmospherics of a situation. Analysts who watch TV regularly often cite its timeliness as the primary reason for viewing. The ability to watch fast-breaking developments allows the analyst to be at the forefront in reporting and analyzing events. Analysts believe that they would be at a real disadvantage if they waited for information from other sources. This attitude was especially prevalent in EURA and OSE, where the daily news is often checked for potential articles for the *President's Daily Brief* and *National Intelligence Daily*.

### Timeliness

The more event driven the office, the more likely its analysts would be to watch TV. If a story was not time sensitive or dealt with a longer-term issue, analysts would wait for FBIS to provide the summaries and translations of newscasts.

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Real-time reporting seemed to be the primary reason to watch TV among the TV users, suggesting that if TV did not cover fast-breaking news, it would not maintain its priority. TV was preferred over print media because the local papers often would not arrive until two or three days later.

### Background Knowledge

Even if TV news coverage provides no new information on the facts of the story, it often enhances an analyst's overall understanding of a country or situation. One analyst said she even paid attention to the commercials, just for general knowledge of the people and the culture. Another analyst said that watching TV was a good way for analysts who have not yet visited the country to get a general idea of what the streets look like, how the people dress, and other general information; TV was the next best thing to being there.

### Uniqueness

The video portion of TV news is the most common source of truly unique information, and it ranked second as the reason for watching the news. Text could be read (b)(3)(n) or the facts could be gained elsewhere, but the footage would provide an "atmospheric" dimension that could not be gained from print. Analysts could see the context in which statements were made or events occurred.

One analyst working on a South American country was surprised by the permissive public attitude regarding a native politician who had violated the law. The politician was acquitted, and it was widely accepted that he bribed his way out of trouble. Although the analyst was aware that the politics of the country are highly personalized, she still was surprised that this individual was acquitted. Once she saw him on TV, however, his popular appeal was evident. She said his charisma would influence even a non-Spanish-speaking viewer.

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LDA, OSWR, and OIA often are required to determine the status of objects and people, and video allows them to do analysis from a primary source. The footage allows them to check facts.

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### Assisting Analysis

Analysts who work on countries where TV is government-controlled tend either to discount TV completely because it is a mouthpiece of the government or to do more analysis. Analysts who discount TV believe that they have other sources that can tell them what is happening in the government. Those who do more analysis are interested in seeing what the government is trying to say to the people or to get the people to believe.

One analyst working on another South American country recalls the time when an opposition party had taken over several town halls in remote regions in that country. The government-controlled news featured man-on-the-street interviews asking citizens' opinions about this. Everyone condemned it, leading the analyst to wonder whether the interviews were staged. Several days later the government forcibly removed the opposition party. The analyst believes that the interviews were trying to prepare public opinion for this action.

Some analysts are interested in finding out what a government wants its citizens to believe

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When the media was not government controlled, a few analysts studied it to help obtain a general understanding of the culture. One analyst, for example, recalled the coverage in a European country during the Persian Gulf War. After the US bombed the civilian/military bunker in Baghdad, the news in this country juxtaposed pictures of dying babies next to pictures of American soldiers. She thought that this type of coverage may have increased local antiwar sentiment.

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**Use of Domestic TV**

Most analysts regard US TV news as a source of background information in the form of new facts, interviews, or local footage. One analyst watched Barbara Walters's interview of Libyan leader Qadhafi because he was interested in what Qadhafi wore and in his general demeanor.

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Some analysts were also interested because they might be asked to comment on something raised in a US broadcast. For example, OSE analysts were interested in a CNN story that implied that Ukraine threatened to sell conventional and nuclear arms to the Arab world. CNN had interviewed the Ukrainian Minister for Defense Conversion, and OSE analysts looked at the complete interview to discover just what he said. They concluded that his remarks were taken out of context and were made to sound unduly controversial. The analysts knew that the "spin" put on the story by CNN would cause alarm, and they wanted to be ready to defuse the story.

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As he put it, "A good analyst is a good investigative reporter, so why not let the news and their investigative reporters do work for you?"

**Prospects**

While TV was used in some way by most analysts in the DI, few consciously thought about using it on a systematic basis to assist their analysis. Most realized that they were getting more than facts, but they did not fully realize what analytical viewing may reveal. As the factors that affect TV viewing become more favorable, more analysts will probably begin to use TV. Still, until TV is viewed as an analytical tool that gives another dimension to DI analysis, TV will not be used as anything more than a unique and timely source of information. If ORD's research does indicate that foreign TV does affect its audience, then this change should begin to take place, and TV will move from being a source of information to a tool of analysis.

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